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ABSTRACT

The Unified Studies Program began at Boston State College in September of 1974. Its model is based on team-teaching, learning contracts, small interdisciplinary seminars, and other open-classroom and unified educational learning/teaching techniques. Boston State College had been compelled to shift its academic assumptions because of financial stringency followed by a rapid expansion during the 1960's. The planning and implementation of the first segment of the test year for the Unified Studies Programs was an example of real cooperation between the faculty and administration of Boston State College. The most significant result of the program appears to be the challenge that accompanies a new venture which requires faculty, students, and administrators to rethink their goals and priorities for general liberal arts education. (Author/KE)

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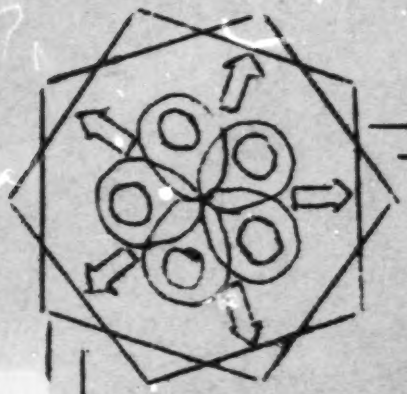
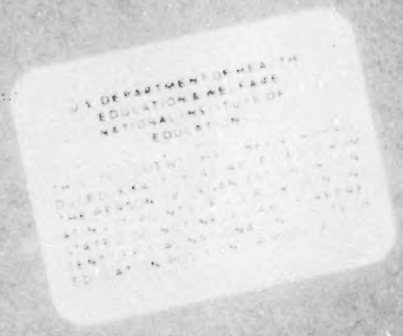


UNIFIED STUDIES — I:2

UNIFIED EDUCATION AT BOSTON STATE COLLEGE, 1972-1974

(1974)



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UNIFIED EDUCATION AT BOSTON STATE COLLEGE, 1972-1974

ABSTRACT: The Unified Studies Program began at Boston State College in September of 1974. Its model is based on team-teaching, learning contracts, small interdisciplinary seminars and other open classroom and unified educational learning/teaching techniques. The description which follows includes the process by which this model came to be implemented, and an outline of the first semester program itself.

The Process of Change:

Change agent strategy must vary with each different learning environment. But there are some common features found in most dynamic undergraduate environments: timing; internal and external pressures; novel ideas; support from both administrative and faculty sources; money; and stamina on the part of those seeking change.

Boston State College, like many other public colleges, has been compelled to shift its academic assumptions during the last decade. Financial stringency followed a rapid expansion during the 1960's. A "new faculty" (57% of the faculty were hired since 1965) had to begin re-thinking the teaching of what Patricia Cross has called the "new student". With the decline in the number of elementary and secondary school teaching positions that began around 1970, the college could no longer continue graduating 75% of its students with teaching degrees.

A number of new curricula were supported by the college faculty and administration including Public Service, Family Studies, A Modular Learning Center, Urban Learning Center, Bi-Lingual Programs, Nursing, Business Management, Contract Minors, Law Enforcement, Fire Science and other Area Studies Programs. For its part, the faculty showed new flexibility by including the Afro-American program as part of its core area of offerings. A proposal for a two year study of general education itself was also initiated. The number

of minority students on campus increased at the same time that more suburban students were being drawn to its campus.

Thus, a confluence of propitious events during the planning stage of the Unified Studies Program contributed to the successful implementation of this innovative undergraduate curriculum.

II The Planning Phase - Funding Proposal

In the fall of 1972 the Director of Program Development and Research proposed a new approach for changing a number of programs at Boston State College. The first step was to collect a large mass of data concerning the college, its students, faculty, administration and programs. Eleven reports ranging from "services available at the college" to geographic, ethnic and economic backgrounds of the student body were prepared.

At the same time the Campuswide Development Committee together with the Director of Program Development and Research solicited new ideas from faculty who were experimenting with various classroom alternatives. The result was a list of six models that ranged from programmed learning modules to field research projects. One of the six was a Unified Instructional Program.

The next step was to secure funding for planning these models. The State College System was by then beginning to feel the pinch of restricted budgets, but nevertheless reserved a Special Projects Fund which was administered by the Provost's Office. The Provost set aside $50,000 for Boston State College and requested that funding proposals be drawn up for three of the six models submitted.

During the fall of 1973 the Director of Program Development and Research assembled seventeen faculty who had volunteered to work on the projects which now became known as Open College Projects #1, 2, and 3. Six people joined the Unified Studies "team".

The faculty who drew up the proposal for securing planning funds began meeting weekly to discuss the general shape of a Unified Studies Program and to

map out plans for both its funding and subsequent approval.

After several weeks of informal talks, a team leader was chosen and the rough outlines of a funding proposal were set down. At a marathon weekend session in October the proposal itself was drafted and submitted to the office of the Provost for approval. It included a budget for half-time released time for the team during the Spring term of 1973 and a modest sum for secretarial, office, research and potential student survey items. The total amounted to $20,000 with the bulk of the funds going to hire replacement faculty for those who were released to do the actual planning.

The Provost and the Board of Trustees approved the funding proposal in January of 1974, and with the help of the President, the Executive Vice President and Academic Dean (as well as the five department chairpersons represented by the faculty) it was possible to shuffle schedules and teaching assignments to allow faculty to join the planning team.

III Planning Phase - Authorization

In February, 1974 the Unified Studies Team (representing the five disciplines of Economics, English, History, Secondary Education, and Sociology) opened an office in the Harvard Building, hired a full time secretary (who subsequently served all three Open College projects), a part time planning consultant, and a research assistant. They began a number of tasks together:

-- a survey of potential students (over 2,000 questionnaires were mailed to drop-outs, part time and transfer students)

-- program planning of the unifying theme for a test year: "Society: Individuals and Institutions"

-- planning for authorization by the five departments, the respective college committies and the administration

-- setting up budget, accounting and office procedures.

Planning sessions were held on Monday evenings (even teaching half time, this was the only large block of time when all of the members of the team were free)

and "decision" meetings were held on Thursdays. In between the team worked on drafts of parts of the proposal itself. The survey of potential student interest mailed out in February and March indicated that about 8% of those surveyed would like to join a team-taught interdisciplinary program based on learning contracts.[1]

The planning team next met with every major committee and group on campus to solicit "feed back" early in the planning process. This served two functions: On the one hand a significant number of people became involved in (or at least knew of) the project; and, on the other hand, the team had to "explain" its ideas frequently before questioning audiences. This clarified thoughts and at the same time opened up areas that the team had ignored.

The team met with:

-- the Student Government Association
-- the Cabinet (Administration)
-- the Department Chairpersons Group
-- the Development Committee
-- the Curriculum Committee, and
-- all five departments

This process took up a great deal of time in February, 1974 but it was essential to the success of the change process.

The research assistant for the program began collecting information concerning a number of other experimental programs around the country. Members of the team visited other colleges in the state college system as well as other schools such as The Evergreen State College,[2] and Boston University's College

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1 Unfortunately, those who expressed interest in March had made other plans by the time official authorization was received in August. Only a handful of those originally surveyed are now in the program.

2 cf. Unified Studies Report, I:1 (1974) "Report of the Evergreen State College"

of Basic Studies. The resource file on alternative education grew to two file drawers.

At this time a special ad hoc Evaluation Group was set up to oversee the Open College Projects. It was composed of representatives from each of the decision making bodies that the team visited. This group met three times during the semester, gave some valuable advice, and decided that ultimately its role would be to evaluate the program at the end of its trial period.

Student volunteers were also sought to participate in the planning. Three students responded, but because of pressing schedules, their work consisted mainly of assisting the research assistant. This was, in fact, predominantly a faculty planned project. Part of the reason for this was another critical decision made in January 1973: only students not currently enrolled at Boston State College could join the Test Year Program in Unified Studies.

The intent was to attract students to the program who might not otherwise be enrolled as full time students at Boston State College. A brochure was printed but distributed only off campus, and only a few posters seeking volunteers were placed on campus.

During the first weekend in March, 1974, the team met at a farm in New Hampshire and, with the help of the planning consultant and the Director of Program Development and Research, put together the work of the preceding two months in the form of a one hundred and fifty page project proposal. This proposal set up a structural model, a tentative list of subject matter contents for the program, a process for authorization and evaluation as well as extensive bibliographies and rationales for program components (copies of this planning document are available).

The proposal linked existing Boston State College structures with the innovative components of the Unified Studies Program by a number of "bridges".

It did not call for a school within (or even without) a school. It did not propose autonomy. Rather it called for interface. For example, faculty were to be released from their regular departments for one year to participate (their evaluations, Committee work and so forth would still take place within their departments); and, students would receive credit for their work through "course equivalencies" to regular catalog course offerings.

The completed proposal was submitted to each of the five departments, the Campus-wide Curriculum Committee and the All-Campus Committee for approval. It passed each unanimously within a two month period. By April the College Administration had reaffirmed its support, and all that remained was to:

-- secure funding for a September start up
-- finish the program planning process
-- admit students into the program

In a rather fledgling way the team prepared over two dozen foundation requests. As with many things in the planning process, what the team was doing was not new -- but it was new to them. Only two of those foundation requests received any kind of positive response and the team once again had to appeal for Special Projects funding from the State College System. Of the initial planning grant, $7,500 remained, and this sum was authorized as a summer "bridge" budget. The office was kept open all summer and the team continued its program planning.

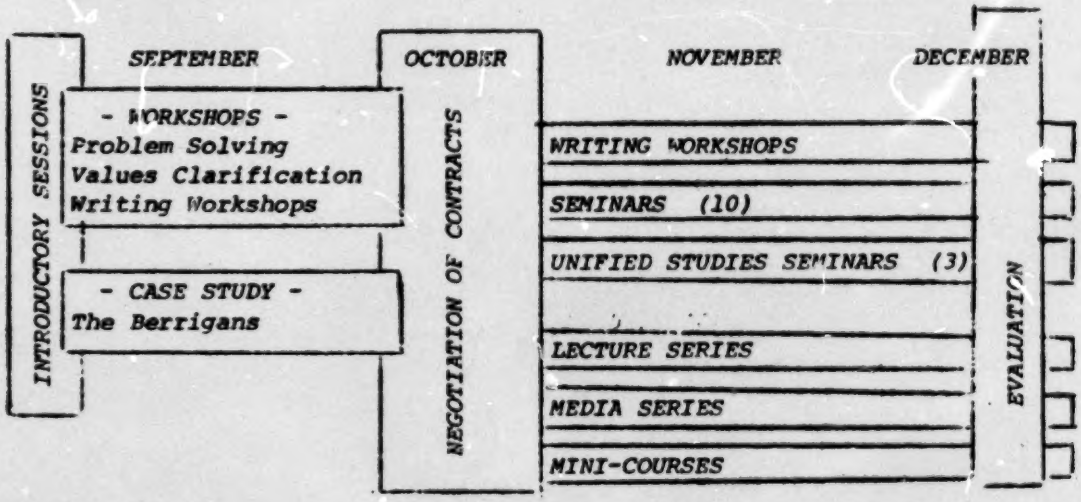
On July 15th the team had a "decision day". What had to be decided was whether or not to postpone the September opening, or to proceed on the basis of informal assurances of an interim grant from the Office of the Provost. The team decided on the latter. However, they still could not formally admit students, and it was not until after August 7th that official notice of funding was received, and formal acceptance letters could be mailed. The program started on September 5, 1974.

IV Summary of the Planning Process:

-- generate alternative ideas
-- secure promise of funding first
-- organize faculty volunteers
-- determine decision makers
-- set up process planning model - incorporate ideas of decision makers
-- get feed back from a wide range of people
-- set up marathon planning sessions
-- secure authorization of funding
-- plan implementation

V The Unified Studies Program - Fall 1974

In terms of structure, the first semester of the Unified Studies Program can be diagrammed as follows (cf. September Packet)



In terms of content, each component included the following:

UNIFYING THEME: THE "INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY"

Introductory Sessions (see September Packet)

Problem Solving Workshop: Synectics
Deductive/Inductive approaches
Methodology of the 5 disciplines

Values Clarification: three workshops conducted by Professor John Santosuosso - various values clarification exercises

Writing Workshop: weekly sessions continuing throughout the semester using Peter Elbow's, Writing Without Teachers
Formation of writing groups (see below)

UNIFYING THEME: "THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY"

Case Study: "The Berrigans - The Individual and Society"

Topics - "War"
Guest: Tom Lewis (of Catonsville 9)
Films: "Vietnam: Journal of a War"
"Vietnam Dialogue"
"The Whole World is Watching"

"The Church and Authority"
Guest: Rev. Thomas Oddo (Harvard)
Films: "Conscience in Conflict"
"Challenge to Authority"
"The Kerner Report"

"Civil Disobedience"
Guest: Dr. Gene Sharp (Harvard)
Films: "The Caine Mutiny"
"Authority and Rebellion"
"The Trial of Billy Budd"

Summary Week: Guest: Dan Berrigan

Weekend Retreat at Rolling Ridge Camp
Discussions, planning sessions, recreation

Negotiation of Contracts: (October 2-4)

Students selected advisors
October Packet of Resource Lists Prepared (cf. October Packet)
Contracts negotiated and signed (cf. contract form)

Seminars: (October 7 - December 17)

Individuals as Agents of Social Change	-- Lee Staebler (Economics)
Technology and Individual Freedom	-- Warren Greeley (Economics)
The Hero	-- Ellie Kutz (English)
Women and Society	-- " "
Personal Wisdom	-- Les Humphreys (History)
The Hedgehog and the Fox (Tolstoy on History)	-- " "
Decisions - Decisions - Decisions	-- Richarde Donelan (Secondary Ed)
Democracy, Schools, Individuals	-- Ed Traverso (Secondary Ed)
Becoming "Human"	-- Linda Perrotto (Sociology)
Deviance	-- " "

UNIFYING THEME: "THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY"

Unified Studies Seminars:
(Weekly Topics - Team Taught) *Guest Lectures*

Autobiography	
Personality	Mr. Sam James (Synectics, Inc.)
Family	Ms Norma Swenson (Childbirth Education Assoc.)
Ethnic Identity	Ms Elma Lewis (Center for Afro-American Arts)
Community	Ms Ruth Zambrana-Shojaei (from Spanish Harlem)
Success/Failure/Competition	Mr. John Holt (Educational Author)
Work/Leisure	Mr. David Greeley (Farmer)
Intimacy/Lonliness	Ms Denise Levertov (Poet)
Soul/Spirituality	Mr. Jack Kornfield (Buddhist Monk)

Media Series:

Films:

Raisin in the Sun	Ship of Fools
Rebel Without a Cause	Hustler
Games Futurists Play	On the Waterfront
Cosmic Zoom	3 Faces of Eve
Futurists	To Be Young Gifted and Black
The Whole World is Watching Us	Citizen Kane
Human Race	Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
Death of a Peasant	5 Finger Exercise

Tapes:
"Lysistrata"
"Antigone"
"Luther"
Numerous other cassettes

Evaluation

An evaluation instrument was administered to both faculty and students on December 17, 1974 and the results of this evaluation will be made available to the Curriculum Committee and the ad hoc Evaluation Group.[3] Because the number of students who entered the program was only half the optimum number (due to limited recruitment time), it was decided that the full scale evaluation by outside consultants envisioned in the original proposal would be uneconomical.

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3 cf. P. McDonough, "Student Survey and Program Evaluation - 1974" Unified Studies Report, I:4 (1975)

SUMMARY:

The planning and implementation of the first segment of the test year for the Unified Studies Program was an example of real cooperation between the faculty and administration of Boston State College. Numerous lessons were learned, and significant modifications have been incorporated into the plans for the second semester of the program.

It is important to note, however, that the most significant result of the program appears to be the challenge and joy that accompany a new venture which requires faculty, students, and administrators to rethink their goals and priorities for general liberal arts education.